



Indian Education For All

The challenges facing American Indian students in Montana must be addressed. The purpose of this Indian education summit brief is to highlight issues and research around Indian Education for All. I

This Summit is convening educators and leaders from across the state to develop an action plan on how to close the achievement gap for American Indian students and ensure that schools can successfully implement Indian Education for All. It will be the collective wisdom of all the participants that will ultimately lead to a full implementation of Indian Education for All in Montana, and not yet another Indian education plan that will sit upon the shelf. There has been a long history ...

*Board of Education Report and Recommendations -
Approved March 22, 2000*

"Our committee has not been the first to make recommendations to implement Article X of our Montana Constitution. Previous statewide efforts requested input from various affected citizens and also made recommendations. Prior efforts include:

1973 - Activation of the Indian Studies Law

1975 – Creation of the Indian Culture Master Plan

1990 – Creation of a State plan to implement Article X

1990 – Creation of the Opening the Pipeline Program

1997 – Establishment of American Indian Heritage Day

1998 – Review of MIEA Summit document

All of these efforts were ineffectual to one degree or another, which is why we are addressing the issue again. Our review indicated that two main reasons prevented the success of these efforts. The first was there was inadequate funding to carry out the programs to any effective completion. The second was the fact that there was an inadequate oversight mechanism to ensure a viable implementation, accountability, and evaluation of the process."

Article X of the Montana Constitution Education and Public Lands

(1) It is the goal of the people to establish a system of education which will develop the full educational potential of each person. Equality of educational opportunity is guaranteed to each person of the state.

(2) The state recognizes the distinct and unique cultural heritage of the American Indians and is committed in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural integrity

Indian Education for All (MCA 20-1-501)

Every Montanan ... whether Indian or non-Indian, be encouraged to learn about the distinct and unique heritage of American Indians in a culturally responsive manner.

...all school personnel should have an understanding and awareness of Indian tribes to help them relate effectively with Indian students and parents...

Every educational agency and all educational personnel will work cooperatively with Montana tribes ... when providing instruction and implementing an educational goal. ...

2004 SCHOOL FUNDING LAWSUIT

Findings Of Fact, Conclusions Of Law And Order

"To have any meaning or effect, the Indian Education for All Act requires resources and programs, which, in turn, require funding. Despite this, the legislature has provided no funding.

In reality, the State appears to be defenseless on Plaintiffs' claim that Article X, Section 1(2) of the Montana Constitution has not been implemented by the State despite the constitution's direction to do so.

This Court hereby rules that the current state funding system violates Article X, Section 1(2) of the Montana Constitution in that the State has failed to recognize the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians and has shown no commitment in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural identity."

(Jeffrey M. Sherlock, District Court Judge 2004)

Related Issues

To help focus and frame discussions during the summit, the Indian Education Summit Planning Committee recognized the following issues as related to drop out and retention issues. They are inter-related and not meant to be all inclusive.

✓ Funding

Many groups including various state agencies and local school districts, along with Montana tribes, have worked very hard over the years to meet the constitutional obligation set forth in Article X. The missing link in Indian education has been funding.

"Where we have failed at state government and at the state legislature is we have never lived up to Article X – if it was fully funded we wouldn't be talking about the same issues over and over again" Dr. Robert Swan

✓ Professional Development

In 2003, an article entitled "White Teachers, Indian Children" ran in the Phi Delta Kappan, a highly respected educational journal, which illustrates some common misconceptions among non-Indian teachers working in our Montana schools:

"...in Montana, every school is required to teach the history of the state's seven tribes. There is no agreement on the content of these histories. There are no texts or curriculum materials, no standards, no assessments and no support materials.

What we white teachers really need is intensive professional development to help us learn to teach children living in a culture we do not understand. We need to learn history from an Indian perspective, to learn the language and traditions that are so much a part of reservation life. But there is no funding for such things. So, with the best of intentions, we stumble on.

The Indian wars are not really over. They may never be. Their effects are visible every day. The issues that matter are seldom, if ever, discussed. Persistent cultural mistrust, long-ago miscarriages of justice, and who did what to whom for what purpose silently linger just below the surface." (Starnes, 2003).

This article presents some interesting issues to look at in relation to fully implementing Indian Education for All. Even though the author's intent is to highlight some of the unique issues facing non-Indian educators, many

misstatements are made. For example, there are seven reservations and 12 tribal groups in Montana; numerous resources are available to schools, and there are standards (content and accreditation). Starnes does highlight the huge need for effective professional development and also brings up issues that rarely ever get discussed in school – the ongoing effects of colonization and racism (individual, internalized and institutional). Schools must be a safe place where all students, Indian and non-Indian, are able to discuss and break down stereotypes and misconceptions especially with regard to Indian and non-Indian relations.

✓ Instructional Materials

What can schools and tribal communities do to ensure that tribal specific cultural knowledge is included as part of the basic curriculum for those schools that serve predominantly Indian students and what can schools all across Montana do to ensure an accurate portrayal of historical and contemporary Indian issues are included in the curriculum?

"It needs to not only be the burden of K-12 education – the Montana University system needs to move from an attitude of not taking Indian country serious and to make it important and that it's their responsibility. We need to review the initial intent of Article X. When is our state going to get an opportunity to really take the lead in Indian education – to really model intercultural understanding. The strength and power of a democratic society are dependent upon the literacy and understandings of its citizens. There is such an opportunity to be a model for the rest of the U.S. "

Julie Cajune, Teacher and Milken Educator

It is now the year 2004 and once again stakeholders are coming to the table to discuss Indian education issues. What can we do this time to ensure that action occurs? A standing joke in Indian country regarding Indian education has been "we have had much thunder and little rain." As an education community, what can we now do to move Indian education forward?